

Detailed planning began in Bloomington in August, 1996. Generating the funds necessary to pay stipends and airfare was no easy task—especially since I was committed to bringing all four women to Bloomington for an entire week of events. The Ethnomusicology Students' Association provided tremendous help in organizing the project, but this group had never before attempted such a large-scale project. In addition to public performances, the plans included classroom lectures on Jamaican verbal and musical traditions as well as poetry and drumming workshops. The project's strength was that it would provide students, faculty, and members of the Bloomington community with the opportunity not only to experience live dub poetry but also to interact with the women in a number of settings. I submitted the proposal to a variety of funding organizations in the fall of 1996, and I began coordinating the event after funds were secured.

During their visit in February, 1997, the women literally interacted with hundreds of people. While they were at Indiana University, I did not fully grasp how deeply these experiences personally affected Cherry, Majeeda, Jean, and Joy. Sharing an apartment and working together gave each of the women the chance to tell stories about her own experiences as a woman and as a performer in a male-dominated genre. They drew inspiration from one another and from audience members, relishing the knowledge that the event celebrated the work and creativity of Caribbean women.

Working with these women remains one of the highlights of my efforts as a public folklorist. The fruits of this project serve as a reminder of the diverse benefits offered by public folklore initiatives, whether they are large or small in scale. The logistics of funding and organizing a program while taking graduate classes was daunting, but the educational and personal rewards for all involved were great. The dub poetry events in Bloomington made a significant impact on the public, the women, and myself. I encourage others to dream big and then act on the public folklore projects that they envision.

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## Who's Gonna Fight, Who's Giving In

*Jan Rosenberg*  
*Heritage Education Resources*

I write about an event that promoted community solidarity, yet ultimately damaged relations between that community and a cultural organization in Texarkana, Arkansas/Texas. It had to do with the sale of beer at a festival initially designed as an organizational fund raiser for a local museum. The museum wanted to sell beer at its festival; the community, predominantly Christian in belief, did not want alcohol served. The result was a community-wide movement to rescind the museum's decision. It worked.

I was involved with both the community and the museum. For six years I worked as the producer of a festival sound stage of traditional Southern, country, and African-American gospel music. It was a successful stage, one in which the festival spirit intertwined with the Holy Spirit in a celebration of religion and community. I became close to many of the singers and musicians. Over time, I was honored to call them my friends. I knew their disdain of beer at an outdoor public event.

In the course of those six years there was discussion about whether or not to sell beer at the festival. Each year, the festival committee—of which I was a member—had voted the idea down. In that last year, however, in an attempt to have a “cosmopolitan” festival, the talk became more forceful in favor of selling beer. In the heat of discussion my planning partner David and I announced that the sale of beer would be counter to the spirit of the Gospel stage. If beer sales were to happen, David and I would not produce the stage.

The new executive director of the museum told me that he would let me know of the board’s decision. Within a short time he called me to say that the board had voted in favor of beer sales.

I wasn’t surprised by the decision, but I was very angry. While the festival was for fundraising, it was also a community event that people enjoyed as a family affair. I also knew from experience that people in the community frowned on alcohol consumption in outdoor public places. I knew that my friends—members of Pentecostal, Church of God in Christ, Southern Baptist, and Assembly of God congregations—refused to be in such spaces.

I called David and spoke with his wife, Kathy. Kathy and David had already discussed the “beer situation,” and agreed: they and their group would not participate in the festival. Kathy, however, went a step further. She began to contact the media about the festival’s intended sale of alcohol. Over the course of the next week she and others in the community were interviewed by the television, radio, and print media. In addition, a series of petitions opposing beer sales was circulated in town. The *Texarkana Gazette* printed stories on the dispute. Later, the paper published an editorial against beer sales.

My own involvement with the dispute was laid back and limited. Yet there were those in town who felt that I was behind the movement. Somehow it was hard for the museum and its board to realize that the community at large was highly invested in keeping the festival “clean” and family oriented. As a result of the fervor, the museum eventually backed down and decided not to sell beer. However, this ruling came too late for the Gospel Stage participants to reconsider their decision not to participate in the festival. The Gospel Stage was dissolved and never became part of the festival again.

As a result of my supposed active role in the dispute, my professional relationship with the museum was destroyed. I don’t regret it. Some things are worth fighting for.